DEDICATION OF THE CENTER FOR WHOLE LIFE AT CABRINI-GREEN

October 24, 1993
2:00 p.m.

Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago
John M. Buchanan, Pastor

Back when I was a youngster growing up in a small city in Pennsylvania, one of the ways people used to greet one another was with a peculiar question:

"What do you know for sure?"

No one ever really answered the question. Nobody ever said "I know 2 + 2 = 4", or that "the sun will rise again tomorrow" — that wasn't the point.

The answer to "What do you know for sure?" was "Not a thing," or "Not very much."

Well today, on this glorious day, I know something for sure . . . and it is this: "You and I need one another." We can't go it alone. Oh, I guess we can survive in a manner of speaking, but we're not very much all by ourselves. And life isn't so great when you're alone. John Donne was right - "None of us is an island" — at least not a very interesting one.

At the very heart of our religion is this idea — we were created for one another, for community, for relationship.

The loveliest picture of what God had in mind is a beautiful description of harmony in the eleventh chapter of Isaiah: "They will not hurt or destroy on my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord."

The word the Bible uses is "Shalom" — peace — people living together in harmony and respect; people taking care of each other; people reaching out to one another.

Reality, of course, is a little different. Reality is not so much shalom — harmony — as it is separation, isolation.

The simple truth is that we are separated by barriers that God did not intend to be barriers.

Ethnicity, race, for instance — people are shooting at and killing each other — killing their children and grandchildren for no reason other than that some are Bosnians and some are Serbians.

People are separated by barriers that God did not intend to be barriers, . . . skin color, for instance; and, of all things, religion.

And people are separated by other barriers — like geography and economics.

So our cities, which I like to think God means to be great festive communities of diversity, rich mixtures of races and religions and languages and customs — our cities turn out to be series of isolated enclaves, communities living beside one another but separated.

To live on either side of the divide is to participate in the separation.

It is important for us to acknowledge that and to repent of it.

And it is more important, far fore important, to find ways to reach across the barriers — or — change the image; to create openings — through the walls that divide us. I like that image. Because you know, if you create enough openings in a wall, sooner or later the wall is going to collapse.

This Center for Whole Life is a bridge or an opening.

It will be a place for community to happen, a space where people can meet and visit and talk and be together.

A place where children will be reminded that they are precious and cared for, not only by their parents - they already know that, but also by others — by people they do not know — the community.

And perhaps, in time, this space will enlarge and in enlarging contribute to the weakening of the barriers.

When Jesus was on the road to the city, and the wall of Jerusalem came into view, the buildings, the temple, he stopped and admired the view and tears welled up in his eyes and he said something haunting —

> "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, would that you know the things that make for peace."
> Shalom. They were tears of grief, but also anger and frustration.

Tears, I think, because the people of Jerusalem really did know, just as we know, what peace requires. . .

We know the things that make for peace —

- Education
- Health care
- Housing
- Jobs

and maybe this, too: this tiny project within this great community.

We are here today to dedicate it: residents, and Presbyterians from all over Chicago.

We are here, grateful for one another —

- Grateful for the hope of people who are already participating in the Center.
- Grateful for Vicki Snow and Ted, Fred, Nancy.
- Grateful for the opportunity to do this together,
- to join hands,
- to remember together a vision of the human community which on occasion - occasions like this - reminds us of God's kingdom itself:

"Where they will not hurt or destroy."

Where old separations are bridged. And people learn to know one another and to care about one another.

And where, indeed, "A little child shall lead them."